

## I: the United States and Foreign Policy

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## Book Reviews

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### Two Review Essays

#### I: THE UNITED STATES AND FOREIGN POLICY

*Two Hundred Years of American Foreign Policy*, edited by William P. Bundy. New York: A Council on Foreign Relations Book. New York University Press, 1977. pp. xi, 251.

*Preparing for the Next War: American Plans for Postwar Defense, 1941-45*, by Michael S. Sherry. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977. pp. x, 238 Notes. \$12.50.

The end of the prolonged and tragic U.S. involvement in Vietnam, followed by the Bicentennial, caused many Americans to wonder about their nation's role in world affairs. Both books under review reflect this tendency. *Two Hundred Years of American Foreign Policy* consists of seven essays that originally appeared in the influential periodical *Foreign Affairs*, a publication of the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations. The essays are aimed primarily at a non-academic audience of government officials and private citizens who are concerned with foreign policy. Michael Sherry's monograph is a revision of his doctoral dissertation and will be read with interest mainly by scholars.

The essays in *Two Hundred Years of American Foreign Policy* cover long time spans and are written by individuals who are not specialists in American diplomatic history. While this means the authors do not have established positions to defend, it also means they are not always abreast of current literature. A theme that appears in many of the essays involves the complex inter-relationship of idealism and realism that has existed in our nation's dealings with others. From the time of independence, some Americans wished to avoid contact with European balance-of-power politics, correctly fearing that involvement could endanger the country. This tendency was counterbalanced

by a realistic appraisal that for a number of reasons, largely related to commercial considerations, the United States could not become a hermit nation. Furthermore, the desire to remain aloof always applied to Europe and not to the Western Hemisphere or to the Pacific Ocean region, as Latin Americans and Asians often have discovered to their regret. In addition, the desire to reject balance-of-power politics at times manifested itself as a drive to remake the world in America's image.

Focusing on U.S. relations with Europe, the authors of the first three articles discuss a number of related issues. The first concerns the ambivalent American attitude to the balance of power. According to Felix Gilbert, the Founding Fathers' desire to avoid power politics stemmed from a wide acceptance of bourgeois values and the influence of European radicals. Both Gilbert and Gordon Craig demonstrate, however, that the leaders of the new nation found it impossible to remain aloof from European affairs. Craig shows how the Founding Fathers shrewdly took advantage of shifts in the European balance to enhance U.S. interests. Second, the authors agree that for nearly a century after the Napoleonic Wars, the European balance worked to America's advantage. No longer threatened by events on the other side of the Atlantic, Americans could turn their attention to building an industrial society and expanding across the North American continent. In his essay on U.S.-British relations, Alastair Buchan correctly argues that the British repeatedly gave way to America because they had greater interests in other parts of the world. Third, the authors believe that the situation changed dramatically during Woodrow Wilson's administration when the U.S. embarked on an idealistic crusade to make the world safe for democracy and, failing in this, turned to isolation in the 1930s. The same sense of idealism inhibited Franklin Roosevelt in his handling of World War II diplomacy. Only with the Cold War did America accept the need to participate in power politics, a task it occasionally pursued with excessive vigor.

John Paton Davies also explores the moralism/realism theme in his lengthy account of America's relations with East Asia. Davies is most effective when describing the rise of Asian nationalism and how American attempts to control this process repeatedly failed. He accuses U.S. officials of being too moralistic in their approach to China and Japan during the 1930s and 1940s. The moralistic policy, he argues, helped produce a vacuum that communist groups filled. Following the "loss" of China, American moralism turned sour and the country was ready to rely on military force to prevent the extension of communist power. Moreover, Americans continually misinterpreted Asian nationalism as communism. The result was Vietnam.

The central challenge to contemporary American diplomacy has been the rise of the communist world, a process begun with the Bolshevik Revolution. In an uneven essay, George F. Kennan traces US-Soviet relations from 1917-76. As he has done elsewhere, Kennan argues that the Soviets were influenced by their ideological opposition to the capitalist world. This made them nearly impossible to deal with over the 1920-45 period. During World War II, President Roosevelt unwisely encouraged Americans to believe that coop-

eration with Stalinist Russia was possible. When the barbaric side of the Soviets surfaced, Americans experienced the sensation of unrequited love, which soon gave way to unreasonable hatred: Stalin seemed worse than Hitler, and extremism gained the upper hand. In the most informative part of the essay, Kennan contends that America's reliance on a militarized foreign policy forced the Soviets to escalate their armaments program. It also blinded Americans to changes occurring within the Soviet Union and caused them to miss opportunities to moderate the Cold War. Presently there exists a real prospect for an arms agreement if U.S. politicians can control the military-industrial complex and right-wing anti-communists.

The region of the world in which the United States has been most free to act unilaterally is Latin America. As Abraham Lowenthal demonstrates, US hemispheric dominance reached its zenith in the twenty years following World War II. Since that time, U.S. power has ebbed, a process Lowenthal would like to see continue. He counsels Americans to avoid intervention, to realize that some parts of South America are more important than others, and to accept the fact that they cannot solve all the hemisphere's ills.

Unfortunately one of the most important facets of foreign policy, that dealing with economic issues, is the most poorly handled. What's worse, Charles Kindleberger is capable of doing an excellent job, as he has done on other occasions. Instead of an enlightening essay, Kindleberger presents a superficial overview for the 200-year period. He is incorrect on several minor facts which makes the reader wonder if anyone so consistently wrong on details can be correct on major points. The author discusses current international difficulties and concludes that the US will have to become the leader of the world economy inspite of its own mounting problems. He remains committed to the vision of an international economy based on the market system even though increasing numbers of countries are rejecting what essentially is an updated 19th-century view.

Taken together, the essays provide an interesting introduction to American foreign policy since independence. Nonetheless, there are some shortcomings. As several authors have shown, America's opposition to balance-of-power politics has not kept officials from taking advantage of favorable shifts. A strong sense of idealism, therefore, has not interfered with a realistic analysis of possibilities for national aggrandizement. A more troublesome point is that the authors have relied on an outdated interpretation of Woodrow Wilson. Since the publication of N. Gordon Levin Jr.'s *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics*, most academics have realized that Wilson was a complex person who combined realism and idealism: for Wilson, the two were inseparable. America's entrance into World War I was never solely an idealistic crusade. Furthermore, it is seriously misleading to imply that disillusioned Wilsonians were responsible for the isolationism of the 1930s. Conservatives who were opposed to New Deal liberalism and worried more about communism than facism provided the backbone of the isolationist movement. The cold-war crusade was caused in part by the same anti-liberal elements.

There are three main reasons why America has faced mounting foreign policy difficulties since World War I and none of them involve excessive moralism. One has been the rapidly changing international system caused by two world wars, the Russian and Chinese revolutions, the Great Depression, the emergence of fascism, and the rise of the non-western world. Davies, Kennan, and Lowenthal touch on aspects of these issues but do not emphasize them adequately. The second has been the way in which the policymaking elite has defined what America's international interests are, what type of world system would protect these interests, and which societies threatened the US world view. None of the authors has come to grips with this point. The third has been the ability of pressure groups and domestic political considerations to influence policy. Kennan and Kindleberger pay some attention to these questions but understate their importance.

Michael Sherry does focus on domestic groups, especially those Army officers who planned for the post-World War II period. Troubled by the US intervention in Vietnam, he hopes to shed light on the origins of the Cold War, the militarization of foreign policy, and the hold which the Munich analogy has had on Americans. Although others have analyzed facets of military postwar planning, he is the first to concentrate on the Army.

Those who worry about excessive military influence on planning may be surprised to learn that this was not the case during 1941-45. In fact, General George Marshall, Army chief of staff and supreme military commander, was rather cautious. Instead of large budgets, he anticipated that the interwar pattern of Congressional parsimoniousness and public apathy would return. His two goals were the development of a smooth demobilization program that would return soldiers quickly to civilian life, and the implementation of a Universal Military Training (UMT) program that would provide a large pool of slightly trained citizen-soldiers. At no time did he, nor virtually anyone else, expect that the inflated military budgets that have existed since 1950 would occur. Moreover, Marshall was careful to defer to civilian leadership and refused to rely on scare tactics to obtain greater appropriations.

As they pondered the future, military planners operated under a number of assumptions. They believed there would be another war caused by an aggressor, though nobody knew who it would be. Assuming the war would begin with a surprise attack, they wanted America to be able to mobilize quickly. Finally most thought that air power would be the decisive weapon. The policy they recommended was UMT. This would allow the military to grow rapidly. By symbolizing national determination, it would tend to deter aggressors. Interestingly, military officers were not noticeably anti-Soviet, with Marshall repeatedly stressing the importance of good relations.

Obviously something happened to undermine this approach. The sudden end of the war led to greater than anticipated pressures for demobilization: the military's plan faltered under the strain. Along with other factors, public annoyance with demobilization doomed UMT. Shortly after the fighting was over, thus, there were no plans for postwar defense. The outlines of a new

consensus quickly took shape. Following the collapse of the UMT campaign, Navy and Air Corps leaders pressed ahead with the more ambitious plans they favored. Moreover, scientists who had benefited from wartime spending were reluctant to see this source of funds dry up. Capitalizing on the public's appreciation for the vast array of technologically advanced weapons that helped shorten the war, they lobbied for larger appropriations.

The key element in forming the new consensus was the deterioration in relations with the Soviet Union, particularly the way national leaders portrayed the issues. Civilian, not military, officials assumed the initiative in advocating a hard line against Russia; and this provided an opportunity for the more aggressive wing of the military to press for increased spending. By the end of 1945, Marshall was no longer chief of staff, and his replacement, Dwight Eisenhower, was arguing that America needed an impressive military machine to deter aggression and prevent a surprise attack. The new defense plans assumed that a future war would be an all-out one between the big powers. Therefore, they did not provide guidelines for responding to difficulties in the newly emerging areas of the globe. Also there was a cruel paradox created by relying on nuclear power as a deterrent: the sheer power of the weapons caused them to lose credibility. Few wished to save the world by destroying it.

For the most part, Sherry has done a commendable job: the book reads well, is fully documented, and the arguments make sense. Along with *Two Hundred Years of American Foreign Policy*, it provides a vivid demonstration of the way unanticipated occurrences influence events, a point all the authors could emphasize more fully. Nobody wanted the US to become a global policeman that spent a large percentage of its Gross National Product for military purposes. Yet this happened because of the way foreign and domestic affairs intertwined and unfolded. The point is not that the participants should have known what the future held in store. Nobody can do that. The most one can hope for is that policymakers and the public remain flexible and reappraise earlier decisions in light of new conditions. As citizens, we must avoid a trap that historians frequently stumble into: we must not try to impose a preconceived and simplistic pattern onto complex events.

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